

## PURPOSE

To describe the accreditation process and possible implications of accreditation for public sector child welfare agencies.

## BACKGROUND

This is a companion memo report to an OIG report on oversight of State Child Welfare Programs (OEI-01-92-00770). That report suggested that the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) find new ways to work with States to make program improvements and solve problems. One option we suggested was to require State child welfare agencies to be accredited, using accreditation bodies overseen by the ACF. This memo report is intended to supplement that report and provide more detailed information on the accreditation of child welfare agencies in general.

### *The Accreditation Process*

Accreditation is a voluntary review process in which outside observers - peer reviewers who are trained, experienced professionals - survey and assess an agency's total operation using recognized criteria in the field.

Accreditation differs from licensing. Licensing is mandatory for private organizations, and is not a peer-review process. Accreditation goes beyond the requirements of State licensing, which normally establishes service "minimums." According to the Council on Accreditation of Services for Families and Children (Council), accreditation establishes a provider as a deliverer of "quality" service. While a licensing process generally occurs annually, accreditation reviews occur less frequently, e.g., every four years. Government-run child welfare agencies are not required to be licensed or accredited.

Accreditation of child welfare agencies, both public and private, has been performed since 1977 by the Council. The Council was created to establish an independent, objective process of agency review in the field of mental health and human services. The Council establishes requirements for accreditation that include standards which address all aspects of any agency's administration, organization, and program. The requirements are established through a process of consensus building in the field.

As of November 1993, the Council had accredited 26 public agencies, of which 25 were American and 1 was Canadian. Two of the accredited public agencies are State child welfare agencies, the South Carolina Department of Social Services, Office of Children, Family and Adult Services, and the Oklahoma Department of Human Services, Children's Services Unit.